DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 282 167 CG 019 935

AUTHOR Burgan, W. Michael
TITLE Cohn's Theme-Centered Interactional Group Process and Student Self Concept.
PUB DATE Apr 86
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American College Personnel Association (New Orleans, LA, April 9-12, 1986).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Attitude Change; Change Strategies; Grade 9; *Group Discussion; Group Dynamics; Junior High Schools; *Junior High School Students; *Self Concept; *Small Group Instruction; *Student Development
IDENTIFIERS *Theme Centered Interactional Method

ABSTRACT

Cohn's theme-centered group process is designed to create a balance between concentration on a group topic or theme and the therapeutic dynamics of group interaction. This study investigated the effect of Cohn's group process on the self-concepts of ninth grade students. Four themes, or teaching units, were chosen for inclusion based on the appropriateness of the theme to the age group and the proven effectiveness of the theme to bring about positive change in self-concept. These themes were study skills, career education, values clarification, and transactional analysis. It was hypothesized that the theme-centered group process would facilitate implementation of the instructional material thereby creating an intervention that would improve self-concept. Ninth grade students were assigned to either an experimental (N=24) or a control (N=22) group. All subjects were given the Piers-Harris Children's Self Concept Scale at the beginning of the school year, at the end of the group process (mid-year), and at the end of the school year. An analysis of covariance revealed no significant difference in scores between the control and experimental groups. It is recommended that other themes, such as decision making and human relations training, and other student variables, such as grade point averages and attitudes about school, be investigated in order to provide a more comprehensive evaluation of Cohn's process. (Author/NB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED282167

Cohn's Theme-Centered Interactional Group Process and Student Self Concept

W. Michael Burgan
Director of Counseling & Testing
Augusta College

Running Head: Cohn Group

CG 019935

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

W Michael Burgan

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Abstract

This study investigated the effect of Cohn's theme-centered interactional group process on the self concepts of ninth grade students. Four themes, or teaching units, were chosen for inclusion based on the appropriateness of the theme to the age group and the proven effectiveness of the theme to bring about positive change in self concept. These themes were study skills, career education, values clarification, and transactional analysis. The underlying hypothesis was that the theme-centered group process would facilitate implementation of the instructional material thereby creating an interventation that would improve self concept. The subjects were 46 ninth grade students who were given the Piers-Harris Childrens' Self Concept Scale at the beginning of the school year, at the end of the group process (mid-year), and at the end of the school year. An analysis of covariance revealed no significant difference in scores between the control and experimental groups. It is recommended that other themes, such as decision-making and human relations training, and other student variables, such as G.P.A. and attitudes about school, be investigated in order to provide a more comprehensive evaluation of Cohn's process.

Cohn's Theme-Centered Interactional Group Process and Student Self Concept

Cohn's theme-centered group process is designed to create a balance between concentration on a group topic or theme and the therapeutic dynamics of group interaction (Cohn, 1972). The process seems well-suited to the educational setting because of its high degree of structure and delimitation of learning goals (Shaffer & Galinsky, 1974). The general focus of the theme-centered approach is the "I-We-It" triangle (Shaffer & Galinsky, 1974). The "I-We" component of the triangle is represented by the individual's emotional-interactional response to the group while the "It" refers to the cognitive learning function (Shaffer & Galinsky, 1974). This dual attention to the feeling and thinking aspects of functioning seems particularly relevant to the early adolescent who is seeking a positive self concept (Erikson, 1963). Four themes or topics were chosen to be utilized with the group process because of their demonstrated success in positively affecting self concept. These themes were career education, transactional analysis, study skills, and values clarification. The purpose of this study was to determine the effect of Cohn's theme-centered group process on the

self concepts of a group of early adolescents. For the purposes of this study self concept was defined as the way students feel about their level of happiness and satisfaction, behavior, intellectuality, status in school, popularity, anxiety, and appearance. It was hypothesized that due to the structure of the theme-centered process, the specification of learning goals, and the proven effectiveness of the themes, positive change in self concept would occur.

Method

Subjects. The 24 students comprising the experimental group, five ninth grade girls and 19 ninth grade boys, from the middle to upper middle socio-economic level, were taken from a group of students who were unable to take one of several semester elective courses being offered at a suburban junior high school. These students were not placed in an elective because of scheduling difficulties or an inability to obtain a chosen elective. A group of these students were randomly chosen and invited to participate in a group that would discuss school and school related problems. All students offered the group discussion elective chose to take it. The 24 students were then divided into four groups of six students who met for 55 minutes a day, five days a week, for 16 weeks. Student group assignments were determined by the student's free period which in turn was determined by random computer assignment. All students that began the group counseling activity finished it.

The control group consisted of 22 students from the same pool

of students as the experimental group, i.e., students who were not placed in a semester elective. This group consisted of 11 ninth grade girls and 11 ninth grade boys. These students were randomly selected and asked if they would be willing to take the Piers-Harris Children's Self Concept Scale for the pre, post, and delayed posttesting sessions. All 22 control group students took the pre and posttest while only 15 of the control group students took the delayed posttest. The loss of the seven students did not appear to greatly change the composition of the control group. Means for the pre and posttestings for the 15 and 22 students were very similar. All students participating in the study, experimental and control, were between the ages of 14 and 15 with the modal age being 14.

Materials. The dependent variables in the study were the total scores on the Piers-Harris Children's Self Concept Scale (Piers & Harris, 1969). The Piers-Harris (PH) was chosen because of its past utilization in similar studies (Carusi, 1984; Crittenden, Kaplan, & Heim, 1984) and its established reliability and validity (Bentley, 1972). The PH measures the way a student feels about his or her behavior, intellectuality, school status, popularity, anxiety, appearance, and happiness and satisfaction. The PH has a possible total score of 94 points.

Procedure. The experimental treatment utilized Cohn's theme-centered interactional group process (Shaffer & Galinsky, 1974) which attempts to create a balance between the group's concentration on the theme, or teaching material, the individual's participation

in the group, and the group interaction. This concentration on both the teaching and the therapeutic aspects makes the interactional method unique and highly applicable to the school environment.

Four themes, or teaching units, were presented to the students during the course of the sessions. These themes were chosen for their appropriateness to the age group of the study and their proven effectiveness in bringing about positive change in student self concept. The theme entitled "What I'm Doing Now and How Does It Relate to my Future?" concerned career exploration and included vocational interest testing and the exploration of various career areas. Career education activities of this type have been shown to improve self concept in early and late adolescents (Shelver, 1976; Coles, 1982; Saulsberry, 1979). "Getting Along Better with Others" used the Harris (1969) transactional analysis text as a basis for exercises in which the students interpreted their behavior and the behavior of other group members. Transactional analysis groups have improved self concept in a variety of groups (Woodward, 1975; Brown, 1974; Carusi, 1984). The unit "How to Learn More in Less Time" was a study skills and motivation course using the Achievement Motivation Training program of Markle, Rinn, and Worthy (1977), memory enhancement techniques adapted from The Memory Book (Lorayne & Lucas, 1974), and several appropriate cassette-workbook exercises from the Listen and Think (Mallis, 1968) series. Study skill improvement activities have been effective in improving self concept in a wide range of populations (Askounis, 1978; Crittenden, Kaplan,

& Heim, 1984). The last theme was "What I Value in my Life" in which the Simon, Howe, and Kirschenbaum Values Clarification (1972) text served as a basis for a group discussion of values. Self concept has been improved, utilizing values clarification, in a variety of settings (Redmon, 1978; Thompson & Hudson, 1981).

It was believed that utilization of material from these themes would enable the students to know themselves better, to develop personally meaningful goals, and to become effective in coping with their academic responsibilities. Interspersed with the theme material the students discussed grades, dating behavior, parents, and other matters of interest. When a student wasn't contributing or interacting an attempt was made by the counselor to elicit this participation and while students were protected from abuse, a certain amount of emotionally charged dialogue was allowed to occur. The client-centered approach (Rogers, 1951), which has been shown to facilitate positive self concept change (Samulewicz, 1975; Bruyere, 1975), was used as the underlying counseling orientation.

There was a pre, post, and delayed posttesting with the PH. The pre-test was given in September at the first of the school year and before the group process began. The posttest was given in January at the end of the first semester when the group activities were concluded. The delayed posttest was given four and a half months later, in May, at the end of the school year.

Results.

In order to control for significant initial differences between

control and experimental groups ($F_{1,44}=12.86, p<.001$) an analysis of covariance was performed using the pre-test scores as covariant. Although the experimental group displayed a 3.33 point gain between pre and posttesting as compared to a .23 point decrease for the control group (see Table 1) the difference was not significant ($F_{1,87}=2.23, p>.05$). For the delayed posttesting the Cohn group evidenced a .42 drop from the posttest score resulting in a 2.92 increase from the pretest indicating that some of the gain from the treatment period was eroding with time. The control group, however, achieved a 1.80 score increase from posttest to delayed posttest resulting in a gain of 2.27 points from pre to delayed posttesting. This indicates a gradual increase in positive self concept for the control group through the year. The changes in both the posttest to delayed posttest ($F_{1,80}=.244, p>.05$) and the pretest to delayed posttest ($F_{1,80}=3.47, p>.05$) were not statistically significant.

Insert Table 1 about here

Discussion

Cohn's theme-centered interactional group process, utilizing the themes of career education, study skills, values clarification, and transactional analysis was found to be ineffective in improving the self concepts of a group of ninth grade students. It may be that a different set of themes ,from those used, might be more

effective. Using multiple themes may not be as effective as concentrating on a single theme. The gain in self concept experienced by the treatment group from the beginning of the group process to the end of the sessions may have been maintained had follow-up activities been provided throughout the remainder of the year. In addition, investigation into the effects of the Cohn method on other student variables such as G.P.A., attitudes about school, motivation to achieve, and student behavior may produce a more comprehensive evaluation of this group process.

TABLE 1

Mean Scores for the Piers-Harris
Children's Self-Concept Scale

	n	PRE-TEST	POST-TEST	DELAYED-POST
Experimental Group	24	51.83	55.17	54.75
Control Group	22	60.32	60.09	61.87*

* n = 15

References

Askounis,A.C. (1978). The effects of study skills instruction and self-concept exercises on study habits and self-concept of college students with academic difficulties: a single subject approach. (Doctoral dissertation, University of Virginia, 1977). Dissertation Abstracts International, 39, 668-669A.

Bentley, P.M. (1972). Piers-Harris Children's Self Concept Scale. In O. K. Buros (Ed.), The seventh mental measurements yearbook, 306-307. Highland Park, NJ: Gryphon Press.

Brown, T.H. (1974). Change of self-concept with an intact group by a transactional analysis approach. (Doctoral dissertation, Southern Illinois University, 1974). Dissertation Abstracts International, 34, 5705-5706A.

Bruyere, D. H. (1975). The effects of client-centered and behavioral group counseling on classroom behavior and self-concept of junior high school students who exhibited disruptive classroom behavior. (Doctoral dissertation, University of Oregon, 1975).Dissertation Abstracts International, 36, 1299A.

Carusi J.A (1983). Self-concept as measured by the Piers-Harris children's self-concept scale before and after a transactional analysis unit intervention. (Doctoral dissertation, Rutgers University, 1983.) Dissertation Abstracts International, 44 2025-2026A.

Cohn, R.C. (1972). Big groups - little groups: Little steps - big steps. Praxis Der Psychotherapie, 17(1), 1-13.

Coles, J.M. (1982). The effects of a career class with a T-group emphasis on the level of vocational self-concept crystalization and self-esteem among selected university freshmen. (Doctoral dissertation, Oregon State University, 1982). Dissertation Abstracts International, 42, 4296A.

Crittenden, M.R., Kaplan, M.H., & Heim, J.K. (1984). Developing effective study skills and self-confidence in academically able young adolescents. Gifted Child Quarterly, 28, 25-30.

Erikson, E.H. (1963). Childhood and society (2nd ed.). New York: Norton.

Harris, T.A. (1969). I'm ok - you're ok. New York: Harper & Row.

Lorayne, H. & Lucas, J. (1974). The Memory Book. New York: Ballantine.

Mallis, J. (Ed.). (1968). Listen and Think. Huntington, N.Y.: McGraw-Hill.

Markle, A., Rinn, R. C., & Worthy, M. (1977). Achievement motivation training: Helping the underachieving student. Huntsville, Al.: Monte Sano Press.

Piers, E. V., & Harris, D. B. (1969). The Piers-Harris children's self concept scale. Nashville: Counselor Recordings and Tests.

Redman, G. (1978). Effects of value clarification training on student self-concept: A review of research. Journal of Teaching & Learning, 4(1), 28-39.

Rogers, C. (1951). Client-centered therapy. Boston: Houghton-Mifflin.

Samulewicz, E. (1975). The effects of critical thinking and group counseling upon behavior problem students. (Doctoral dissertation, Lehigh University, 1975). Dissertation Abstracts International, 36, 2645-2646A.

Saulsberry, G.F. (1979). The effect of an exploratory allied health career program on minority adolescents' self-concept and career attitudes. (Doctoral dissertation, Boston University, 1979). Dissertation Abstracts International 40, 2455-2456A.

Shaffer, J.B.P., & Galinsky, D.M. (1974). Models of group therapy and sensitivity training. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall.

Shelver, J.W. (1976). The centering of career in self through an elementary career education program. (Doctoral dissertation, Northern Illinois University, 1975). Dissertation Abstracts International, 36, 6488A.

Simon, S,B., Howe, L.W., & Kirschenbaum, H. (1972). Values clarification. New York: Hart.

Thompson, D.G., & Hudson, G.R. (1982). Values clarification and behavioral group counseling with ninth-grade boys in a residential school. Journal of Counseling Psychology, 29(4), 394-399.

Woodward, R.B. (1975). The effects of transactional analysis on the self-concepts, social adjustment, and grade point averages of intellectually advantaged, intellectually normal, and intellectually disadvantaged sixth grade students. (Doctoral dissertation, Mississippi State University, 1974). Dissertation Abstracts International, 35, 5045A.